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**Subject:** NEWS UPDATES: EPA says it's revamping risk-assessment program (E&E News PM)  
**Date:** 02/03/2012 02:32 PM

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# EPA says it's revamping risk-assessment program

Jeremy P. Jacobs, E&E reporter

Published: Thursday, February 2, 2012

U.S. EPA said today that it's working quickly "behind the scenes" to implement the National Academy of Sciences' recommendations for improving assessments of chemicals' health effects.

In its review of EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessment of formaldehyde last April, a NAS panel criticized the agency's methodologies and made several recommendations for all IRIS chemical reviews.

Vincent Cogliano, the acting director of IRIS, said the recommendations were reasonable, EPA agrees with them and it is moving in that direction every day.

"We embrace all of these recommendations," Cogliano said at a Toxicology Forum conference. "These are things we need to do, and these are things we are doing right now."

The NAS review faulted EPA's assessment of formaldehyde, finding the agency's methodologies confusing. Reviewers dedicated a chapter to recommendations for future IRIS assessments ([Greenwire](#), April 8, 2011).

The NAS report spurred attacks on EPA by industry groups and congressional Republicans, who called for halting assessments while the agency implements the panel's recommendations.

IRIS assessments are the foundation for EPA and other agencies' regulations.

David Dorman of North Carolina State University, a member of the NAS panel, said today the formaldehyde assessment was a mixed bag. In particular, he said it wasn't clear why EPA included some studies in its assessment but excluded others. He also said the method the agency used to find studies wasn't properly articulated.

"Overall, what we felt was there was an opportunity for improvement in some areas and drastic improvement in others rather than a complete do-over," Dorman said.

IRIS has been frequently criticized. The Government Accountability Office included it in its annual list of troubled federal programs last year. Last month, GAO said IRIS had made improvements but that challenges remain, including speeding up its laggard pace for issuing assessments ([E&ENews PM](#), Jan. 9).

Cogliano, who came to EPA last year after working at the World Health Organization, has pledged to reform the IRIS system ([Greenwire](#), March 30, 2011).

Among his top priorities, he said today, is making IRIS assessments more succinct. Many of the reports have grown to more than 400 pages, which he said "isn't sustainable." Consequently, IRIS is "rigorously editing" the assessments in hopes of making them more streamlined.

To address the methodology concerns that Dorman noted, Coglianò said, the agency is drafting a preamble that will describe how it evaluates and selects studies. These criteria, he said, are taken directly from the NAS review.

The assessments will now include standardized evidence tables and criteria for each study included.

Cogliano also said the agency is implementing ways to include peer reviews earlier in the drafting process. EPA's Science Advisory Board is currently forming a new Chemical Assessment Advisory Committee that will provide a consistent source of peer reviewers for all IRIS reports.

"That, over the next one and two years, will be very key to our progress," Coglianò said.

Cogliano did not say, however, when the long-awaited formaldehyde assessment will be finalized.

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